



QUEER MARXISM IN TWO CHINAS

PETRUS LIU

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CHAPTER I

MARXISM, QUEER LIBERALISM, AND THE QUANDARY OF TWO CHINAS

When hearing about contemporary China, we do not often find the words *queer* and Marxism in the same sentence. If anything, it seems that these two categories work against each other: Scholars often attribute the emergence of queer cultures in China to the *end* of Marxism and socialism. If a previous generation of Chinese cultural studies scholars seemed uniformly concerned about the specters of Marxism, today's queer critics are more likely to worry about neoliberalism and gay normalization. The scholarly consensus is that, after Deng's 1978 market reforms, the phenomenon many critics have described as the "new homonormativity" in US culture is taking place in postsocialist China as well. The turn to neoliberalism in queer Chinese studies responds to a global conversation of the highest importance. Lisa Duggan defines homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."¹ Michael Warner argues that homonormativity in the gay liberation movement requires a "more consolidated gay identity" and signals a "retreat from its history of radicalism into a new form of postliberationist privatization."² The phenomenon Duggan and Warner describe is well known and seemingly ubiquitous. A popular T-shirt at a Pride March in San Francisco a few years ago illustrates the point particularly well: "My gay lifestyle? Eat, sleep, go to work, pay taxes." With the homonormative turn, many gay men and women now believe that the best strategy for mainstream inclusion and equal rights (such

as same-sex marriage) is to show society that they, too, are morally upstanding citizens who are no different from anyone else. Worried about homonormativity, new queer theorists now focus on critiquing “queer liberalism,” the economic and social structure underlying this depoliticized consumer space of metrosexual glamor and bourgeois rights. Queer critics point out that liberalism has spawned a homonormative desire to dissociate homosexuality from culturally undesirable practices and experiences such as AIDS, promiscuity, drag, prostitution, and drug use. While it is certainly understandable why gay men and women may wish to combat the conflation of homosexuality with other cultural definitions, the desire for mainstream inclusion has also alienated, disempowered, and further stigmatized gay men and women who are prostitutes, drug users, transvestites, promiscuous, or living with AIDS.³ As Nicole Ferry points out, the homonormative movement is not an equality-based movement, but an inclusion-based assimilation politics with exclusionary results.⁴ The situation is clearly worrisome once we recognize that the culture of homonormativity provides a poor political model by suggesting that assimilating to heterosexual norms is the only path to equal rights.

Many instances suggest that a culture of homonormativity has emerged in the People's Republic of China (PRC) after the state officially entered a postsocialist era by adopting experiments in neoliberalism and privatization.⁵ Although LGBT political movements have made important advances in mainland China—significantly, the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and its removal from categories of mental disorder by the Chinese Psychiatric Association in 2001—other inequalities have deepened. As Lisa Rofel shows, the advent of neoliberalism produced hierarchically differentiated qualities of desire.⁶ China's neoliberal integration into global infrastructures intensifies the process of gay normalization through the discourse of “quality” (*suzhi*). With the homonormative turn, certain “improperly gay” subjects, such as China's “money boys,” are routinely abused from within the gay community. Seeing money boys as a blight on the image of the homosexual community, Chinese gay men are eager to dissociate themselves from money boys in their quest for respectability and global cultural citizenship as China becomes increasingly liberalized, affluent, and cosmopolitan.⁷ Rofel describes how the rise of neoliberalism reconfigures the dreams, aspirations, and longings of gay men and

women in China, producing novel forms of cosmopolitan aspirations, public culture, identities, and modes of memorializing their pasts. In this way, the differentiation of good and bad forms of gay desire also cements boundaries between rural and urban, elite and common, commercial and privatized.

Queer critics who work on the intersections of Chinese sexualities and neoliberalism provide numerous historical examples that explain why queerness and Marxism are understood in antithetical ways. Rofel's two studies, *Desiring China* and *Other Modernities*, analyze the dominant perception among a broad public in China that Maoist socialism was a distortion of people's natural genders and sexualities. Rofel argues that this view, which has become common sense among many, relies on a revisionist history, a distortion of the past that encourages people to reject their socialist past. Once the past has been constructed this way, postsocialist allegories emerge to represent a desire to free one's gendered and sexual self from the dictates of the socialist state. Accordingly, the queerness of human desire comes to be viewed as what sets limits to any and all utopian efforts to control human productivity and to explain the motions of history through economic categories. The arrival of neoliberalism—which, as Rofel crucially argues, is not a *fait accompli* but an ongoing series of experiments that are centrally about desire—produces yearnings that propel people to reinvent “the strictures and sacrifices” for their socialist past by way of cosmopolitan consumption.⁸ Compared to Rofel's work, Travis Kong's *Chinese Male Homosexualities* paints a bleaker picture of China's newly emergent queer communities, but similarly emphasizes the complicity between a consolidated homosexual identity and the consumer culture of neoliberal capitalism. Kong shows that the emergence of gay and lesbian identities in China was predicated on the relaxation of state control of the private sphere following the replacement of communism by neoliberalism. Song Hwee Lim similarly attributes the rising representations of homosexuality in Chinese screen cultures to neoliberal globalization, arguing that an internationalized, deterritorialized economy of film production “introduced homosexuality as a legitimate discourse in Chinese cinemas in ways that may not have been previously possible.”⁹ These accounts of China's neoliberal queer culture complement the global narrative developed by David Eng's critiques of the increasingly mass-mediated consumer lifestyle in *The Feeling of Kinship*:

Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy (2010). In these studies, queer critics either emphasize the agency of queer desire and bodies against state prescriptions, or expose the complicity between new sexual politics and advanced liberalism. But in either scenario, the focus is on China's postsocialist character after the neoliberal turn, which implies that Marxism, whether good or bad for queers, has ceased to be a relevant consideration.

The critique of queer liberalism therefore unwittingly naturalizes the assumption that China has unequivocally entered a postsocialist phase. However, we might pause to ask, is neoliberalism truly the dominant cultural logic of contemporary queer Chinese cultures? Are queer cultural expressions always complicit with neoliberal globalization and the politics of gay normalization? Is there a critical, dissident, and, indeed, *queer* Chinese culture anymore? Treating contemporary Chinese queer cultures as a symptomatic expression of a globalizing neoliberalism creates an impression that they are belated copies of the liberal West, evolving along the same path with no local history and no agency. According to this narrative, China's socialist past and dialogues with international Marxism appear to be a detour at best, with no lasting effects on the development of its queer cultures. Ultimately, China has arrived at the same conundrum we see in North America today: queer liberalism and homonormativity.

The story I tell in this book is different. *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* reconstructs a rich and complex tradition of postwar queer Chinese works that retool and revitalize Marxist social analysis. In assembling this queer Marxist archive, I also propose two intertwined arguments that depart from the scholarly consensus in Chinese queer studies. First, instead of reading contemporary Chinese queer cultures as responses to neoliberal globalization, I argue that a unique local event has centrally shaped the development of Chinese queer thought: the 1949 division of China into the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China on Taiwan (ROC). In referring to the PRC and the ROC as two Chinas, I am less interested in making a political provocation than in historicizing the implications of their coexistence for queer practice. My second argument is that postwar queer Chinese writers, many of whom are based in the ROC rather than the PRC, developed a unique theory and literature by fusing Marxism with inquiries into gender and sexuality. The fact that Marxism flourished in anticommunist

ROC may come as a surprise. While the queer Marxist tradition embodies a living dialogue between the ROC and the PRC that attests to the permeability of their boundaries, it also highlights a need to disarticulate Marxism from the communist bureaucracy of the PRC. This little known cultural history of queer Marxism in the two Chinas indicates the vitality and dynamism of Marxism in divergent vectors of queer thought. The geopolitical rivalry between the PRC and the ROC becomes an unexpected kind of productive tension for Chinese queer discourse, which, in turn, is also compelled to revise and reintegrate Marxist thought into the analysis of gender and sexuality in distinctive ways.

Although the book title pluralizes Chinas, and most of my examples come from the ROC, my project is not a Sinophone studies book. My intention is not to bring together materials from the peripheries of the Sinophone world—Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia, Indonesia, and North America—to develop a non-PRC-centered story of queer lives in Chinese-speaking communities.¹⁰ Rather, I am interested in historicizing the ways in which Chinese writers, in any location, came to view the historical creation of the PRC and the ROC as a foundational event for queer life. Because the aim of my project is not to displace Chineseness with Sinophone, Sinoglossia, or other critical concepts, I am not treating works by Taiwan-based writers as an expression of Taiwanese-ness. In choosing my examples, I have also privileged transnational and transcultural texts—for example, Chen Ruoxi's *Paper Marriage*, a novel about an American man and a mainland Chinese woman who cross boundaries of nationality and sexual orientation, which the author wrote based on her experiences in the PRC, the ROC, and the United States. Similarly, because my use of the concept of “two Chinas” is historical rather than ideological, my study also excludes Hong Kong as a primary site of consideration. Certainly, Hong Kong-based authors have also developed important queer reflections on liberalism, socialism, and Marxism.¹¹ Far from being comprehensive, my archive of queer Marxist practice invites comparisons with not only Hong Kong's neoliberalism but also Singapore's “illiberal pragmatism” as a technique of queer social management.¹² It is my hope that *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* will initiate critical interest in such transregional studies.

My study of the continuous dialogues and cross-pollination between Marxist and queer thought stems from a desire to understand

Chinese queer cultures' engagement with the geopolitics of the Cold War that produced the two Chinas and their corresponding ideological significations. After all, the ideological legacy of the Cold War cements our habitual readings of the economic fortunes of the PRC and the ROC as the historical vindication of Marxism and liberalism. I argue that any discussion of liberalism in the Chinese context must begin with the Cold War divide, because the rise of liberalism in the PRC's political history is critically informed by Taiwan's historical claim as Free China and by its identity as China's "economic miracle"—namely, what would happen in mainland China if the PRC government had adopted liberalism and capitalism instead of socialism. As an ethnically Chinese state without a colonial administration, Taiwan provided the most relevant and compelling economic model for PRC leaders when they first considered liberalizing the market. While the ideologically retrograde elements of Free China discourses are obvious, the legacy of the Cold War has also given rise to positive and productive queer appropriations. In chapter four, for example, I offer a reading of the 1980s' queer narrative of self-invention, entrepreneurship, and miraculous development, to dissect the historical subjectivity underpinning the two Chinas' transitions to postsocialism and postmartial law market economy. For the queer Marxist cultural producers considered in this book, the geopolitical conflicts between the two Chinas are both a historical burden and an intellectual opportunity. Indeed, I would suggest that a persistent engagement with the geopolitics of two Chinas forms the basis of a Chinese materialist queer theory that sets it apart from its Euro-American counterparts.

One of the aims of this book is to develop a useful account of the insights and distinctive features of Chinese queer theory, since we are used to thinking of queer theory as an exclusively Euro-American enterprise. In writing this way about the connections between Chinese queer theory and geopolitics, I also present theory as a product of historically determinate circumstances rather than as a set of timeless principles we can apply to a variety of cultural situations. At the same time, characterizing theory, queer or nonqueer, as a product of the conditions of its own genesis also risks reifying cultural differences. Without raising the enormously complex questions of cultural essentialism and universalism, I would like to propose at this point some of the distinctive achievements and concerns of queer Marxism in the Chinas in

contrast to more familiar intellectual paradigms in the United States. One of the hallmark achievements of US queer theory is the exploration of the intersectionality of identity categories. For example, the “queer of color critique” in recent years provides a powerful framework for exposing the mutual dependency of racialization and sexual abjection.¹³ But while US-based queer theory enables a rethinking of the relations between the diacritical markers of personhood—race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion—this queer theory’s conception of social differences remains restricted by a liberal pluralist culture of identity politics that is distinctively American.¹⁴ By contrast, Chinese theory of the geopolitical meditations of queer lives does not begin with the concept of social identity; instead, it emphasizes the impersonal, structural, and systemic workings of power. Whereas US queer theory responds to the failures of neoliberal social management by postulating an incomplete, foreclosed, or irreducibly heterogeneous subject of identity, Chinese queer Marxists develop an arsenal of conceptual tools for reading the complex and overdetermined relations between human sexual freedom and the ideological cartography of the Cold War. For these thinkers, to raise the question of queer desire in this context is also to examine the incomplete project of decolonization in Asia, the achievements and failures of socialist democracy, the contradictory process of capitalist modernization, and the uneven exchange of capital and goods.

The intellectual tradition of queer Marxism offers a nonliberal alternative to the Euro-American model of queer emancipation grounded in liberal values of privacy, tolerance, individual rights, and diversity. In my view, contemporary queer critics of homonormativity, queer liberalism, and homonationalism have much to gain from a consideration of this nonliberal queer theory. The existence of Chinese queer Marxism also indicates that LGBTQ communities in the world do not evolve along the same, inevitable path prescribed by a globalizing neoliberalism. Indeed, it would be a mistake to interpret the emergence of queer identities and communities in the two Chinas as belated versions of post-Stonewall social formations in the United States under a singular logic of neoliberal globalization. The archive of queer cultural artifacts and intellectual discourses I assemble in this book disrupts that developmentalist narrative by demonstrating the importance of Marxist reflections on the 1949 division for contemporary queer thought. The confrontation between queer and Marxist discourses in Chinese

intellectual scenes reveals a hidden chapter of the global history of cultural materialism that parts company with both metropolitan understandings of capitalism as corporate greed and the standard signification of global Maoism as Third-World revolutionary struggles.

In literary and cultural studies in North America, Marxism has come to be understood as a somewhat specialized academic sub-discipline associated with figures such as Fredric Jameson and Gayatri Spivak, whose monumental works renewed critical interest in Georg Lukács's concepts of totality and reification, Antonio Gramsci's theories of hegemony and mediation, and Louis Althusser's structuralist interpretation of the economic base as an "absent cause." While the American reception of Marxism made critical contributions to both dialectical philosophy and historical materialism, it has also become increasingly divorced from the "economistic" debates in European and Asian Marxisms concerning such technical questions as "the transformation problem," the withering away of law, the value form, the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and theories of accumulation and crisis. Nonetheless, the culturalist reinterpretations of Marxism have not rescued it from accusations of economic reductionism and foundationalism, against which queer theory and other "postfoundationalist" projects consciously rebel.¹⁵ While the critique of foundationalism is both timely and necessary, the framing of Marxism as a monolithic intellectual orthodoxy plagued by problems of determinism, teleology, utopianism, and economism also misses the opportunity to deploy the insights developed by Marxist authors for queer use.

In schematic terms, the queer writers examined in this book explore four areas of social thought that are historically associated with Marxism: first, the indivisible organicity of the social body (totality); second, the distinction between formal and substantive equality (fetishism); third, theories of community, species-being, and primitive accumulation (alienation); and, finally, the question of social transformation (ideology). The rich tradition of queer Marxism thus differs from orthodox Marxism's emphasis on the primacy of economics. For the queer cultural producers discussed in this book, Marxism is not so much the content of queer reflections, but a methodology. The analysis I offer significantly differs from projects that seek to "queer" Marxism through delightfully perverse (mis-)readings of letters between Marx and Engels, rehistoricizations of deskilled labor as the conditions of possibility for

the performance of masculinity and reified desire, or interpretations of capitalism as the production of desiring machines and bodies without organs. These queer Marxist projects share two assumptions: that capitalism is the exclusive property of Euro-American modernity, and that Marxism is a closed system incapable of dealing with the complexities of modern life (such as sexuality) and therefore needs to be “queered.” By contrast, the type of Marxism I invoke in this study does not take capitalism’s historical development in Europe as its privileged object of analysis. Neither do I regard queerness or biopolitical production as the conceptual tools needed to rescue Marxism from its ideological blind spots. Instead of queering Marxism, the authors I consider in this book bring the methodology of Marxism to bear on queer lives. In their works, Marxism is not a state policy such as the planned economy or collectivized labor, but a living philosophy. As a methodology rather than an ideology, Marxism inspires queer authors who occupy a variety of political positions that may be at odds with the “actually existing Marxism” of the People’s Republic of China. While some of the most ingenious and hybrid uses of Marxist theories of social structuration, alienation, and totality come from PRC political dissidents who are openly critical of the Communist Party, ROC-based intellectuals have also developed textured narratives of the failures of liberal pluralism through recourse to Marxist theories of substantive equality. As represented by these texts, queerness exceeds the sexual meaning of homosexuality. Instead, queerness indicates a constitutive sociality of the self that counters the neoliberal imagination of formal rights, electoral competition, and economic growth.

Beyond Neoliberal Homonationalism

In both English and Chinese scholarship, this turn toward a critique of neoliberal homonormativity is informed by two of the most galvanizing developments in queer theory.¹⁶ The first development is the theory of queer temporality, a dynamic body of scholarship that accomplishes many things: it theorizes the conflict between reproductive futurism and queer negativity;¹⁷ excavates a different political historical consciousness from the pleasures of the past;¹⁸ critiques the normative model of temporality that organizes bourgeois reproduction, inheritance, risk/safety, work/play;¹⁹ analyzes movements of sex before the

homo/heterosexual definition as figurations of the “untimely”;²⁰ and even writes, proleptically, queer theory’s own obituary.²¹ The second important development is the much discussed “affective turn” in queer theory, which has also produced an explosive growth of exciting scholarship on gay and lesbian emotion, charting a passage from negative feelings (shame, loss, melancholia, grief, trauma) to positive feelings (outrage, sociability, happiness, public feelings, touching feelings, optimism) in queer history.²² As generative as these forms of scholarship have been, theories of queer temporality and works in affect studies have a dematerializing tendency. Certainly, the affective turn in queer studies has significantly expanded a Marxist cultural materialism that includes Raymond Williams’s analysis of structures of feelings and Herbert Marcuse’s syncretic writings on Eros and civilization, attuning us to the mutually constitutive and mutually embedded relations between emergent social forms and queer affect.²³ In their emphasis on the subjective meanings of pleasure, play, and desire, however, new queer studies sometimes give insufficient attention to the impersonal structures and conditions of social change.²⁴

There is no question that postsocialist China and postmartial law Taiwan have entered a new era marked by the biopolitical production of the neoliberal subject. Yet this bioproduction has also given rise to a reinvigorated Marxist analysis from within Chinese intellectual circles, which suggests that it is difficult to theorize queer subjectivities as a question of affect and shifting temporalities alone. The phenomenon of China’s “pink economy” presents a complex cultural semiotic that the production of the neoliberal subject only partially explains. The metropolitan dreams of China’s new queer bourgeoisie, like any dream-text, have manifest contents as well as deep structures. On the surface, many of these developments do suggest that a new era of liberal rights has dawned to bring about the hypervisibility of queer issues in the public domain. At the time of my writing in 2014, Taiwan is in the midst of massive protests against a proposed bill to legalize same-sex marriage, which would make Taiwan the first Asian country to do so. In the PRC, a visible and self-affirmative gay culture has appeared as well. A recent mainstream blockbuster, *Tiny Times* (2013), adapted from the director Guo Jingming’s own best-selling trilogy *Xiao shidai* (2008, 2010, 2011), comfortably and confidently presents homoeroticism, male nudity, and sexual experimentations as metropolitan glamor. In Beijing and

Shanghai, gay bars, saunas, cruising spots in parks, and other establishments are surrounded by restaurants that cater to middle-class gay consumers. Gay-themed television shows, lesbian pulp fiction, pop songs, youth culture, film festivals, and money boys abound.²⁵ Many of these structural transformations have impacted not only popular culture but also high art: as Fran Martin's study shows, contemporary Chinese lesbian cinema has entered a distinctively new phase marked by a "critical presentism" that defines a self-consciously minoritizing lesbian identity, here and now, over and against an earlier, "memorial mode" of narrating same-sex love in the schoolgirl romance genre, where the dominant tendency is to bracket off same-sex experiences as an interlude in an otherwise unilinear and indicatively heterosexual life history.²⁶ New developments in literature, as well, contribute to this sense of the present as a groundbreaking moment marked by new identities, politics, communities, markets, and bodies in China.²⁷ As several recent sociological and ethnographic studies have observed, self-identified "tongzhi," "tongren," and "lala," have established their own social vocabulary,²⁸ new community formations on the internet,²⁹ affective ties, recreational culture,³⁰ support networks,³¹ relationship strategies, and even marriage rituals.³² Indeed, since the 1990s, mainland China has seen numerous milestones of gay visibility and social rights: the 1997 repeal of the criminal code of "hooliganism" (under which homosexuals could be prosecuted),³³ Li Yinhe's campaign to legalize same-sex marriage in China in 2001, the 2001 Chinese Gay and Lesbian Film Festival at Beijing University,³⁴ the removal of homosexuality from the medical category of perversions by the Chinese Psychiatry Association in 2001, the inaugural Shanghai Pride in June 2009, and the appearances of mainstream lesbian, gay, and transgendered television celebrities (such as Jin Xing).³⁵ As Lisa Rofel describes, while "from one perspective it might seem as if the Chinese state creates strict constraints on political activism, from another perspective the difficulty of doing politics on the terrain of 'rights' opens up a space that enables a different kind of political creativity"—an example being Pink Space (Fense kongjian), founded by He Xiaopei.³⁶

Queer culture in the PRC is so developed today that the topic of homosexuality per se, once taboo and subsequently greeted by many people with fascination, can no longer command the attention of the public. Instead, today's China has seen a proliferation of sexual discourses

and identities. *Tongqi* is a new item of China's popular vocabulary that refers to gay men's wives. These "beards" or "living widows" are a new social minority and the constituency of a new social movement in China. A hotly debated topic on Chinese internet forums today, the *tongqi* social movement of "living widows" demonstrates the hypervisibility of contemporary queer issues in China. The intensity of the conversation bears witness to the lightning speed at which Chinese reception and culture of sexuality have evolved. In 2011 a former living widow, Yao Lifen, founded *Tongqi jiayuan*, an organization designed to mobilize and empower other living widows.³⁷ The organization offers resources and counseling for women who unknowingly married homosexual men, but it also emphatically portrays homosexuality as a threat to women's happiness. Its website characterizes women married to homosexual men as victims of domestic abuse and psychological trauma, and homosexual men as selfish liars who abuse women to protect their own secrets. In fact, the organization urges the Chinese government to penalize deceitful homosexual men by criminalizing such marriages as fraud, and claims that such marriages pose a threat to public health by exposing unsuspecting Chinese women to AIDS. While *Tongqi jiayuan* pathologizes homosexuality and homosexual men, other voices have emerged. Pink Space provides a support group for wives of gay men as well, but the goal of the latter group is to promote understanding and dialogue between these women and the gay male community. A recent television show, "What Are We Doing to Rescue Wives of Homosexuals?" described those women as a "new minority in China more disempowered and alienated than homosexuals" and estimated their number to be around 16 million based on a study by Zhang Beichuan, a professor at Qingdao University.³⁸ According to the study of Liu Dalin at Shanghai University, China has 25 million *tongqi* at the moment.³⁹ In the realm of arts and literature, *tongqi* is a well-known topic in China. As early as 2003, Andrew Yusu Cheng's feature film, *Welcome to Destination Shanghai*, already presents a kaleidoscopic view of the entangled lives of *tongqi* and other disenfranchised characters on the margins of society. Two recent popular novels, Qing Zizhu's *Tongqi* and Jin Erchuang's *Tongfu Tongqi*, depict the social life and dilemmas of *tongqi*, while a new feature film made in Taiwan, *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?* (Arvin Chen, 2013), bears witness to the cultural interest in the topic across the straits. *Tongqi* is therefore a transregional and a transcultural formation. The attention the topic

has gained not only indicates that sexuality issues have entered a new phase in the PRC, but also demonstrates that the boundaries between the PRC and the ROC are often more porous than we acknowledge.

While these developments unambiguously suggest a neoliberal transformation of queer identities and discourses, many crucial questions are left unanswered without a materialist analysis. Above all, it is unclear whether the queer community's newfound visibility indicates collective social progress, or the cooptation of the gay movement by neoliberal capitalism. For example, Fang Gang's 1995 book, *Homosexuality in China*, brought about the first legal case against the libel of homosexuality and is for that reason frequently cited as a milestone of gay cultural history in China.⁴⁰ For queer Marxist Cui Zi'en, however, Fang Gang's work exemplifies an opportunistic voyeurism that transforms the social plight of homosexuals into a commodity.⁴¹ A similar and earlier example is the publication of Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo's coauthored book, *Their World: A Penetrating Look into China's Male Homosexual Community*. No scholar can deny that Li and Wang's book brought about a paradigm shift in gay and lesbian research in China, and that Li, a prominent sociologist, sexologist, and advocate of gay rights, has made numerous contributions to China's LGBT community. In particular, Li is well known for her campaign to legalize same-sex marriage in China. However, Li and Wang's book, as its title shows, has also been criticized for objectifying and exoticizing the gay community. Critics point out that Li and Wang emphatically separate the researchers from the object of their inquiry ("their world"), while establishing the researchers as the authoritative and scientific fact-finders who "penetrate" China's male homosexual communities.⁴² A catalogue of queer films, novels, visual arts, conferences, and social movements alone will not provide a meaningful account of how and how much PRC's sexual communities have evolved. These changes need to be recontextualized by an analysis of the political economy of two Chinas.

Excavating the Marxist intellectual roots of contemporary queer thought in the Chinas is one way of answering some of today's most urgent questions: How does being queer matter? If China's popular culture and social science research indicate that homosexuals are not just visible, but already firmly established in their roles as society's latest neoliberal subjects fighting for mainstream inclusion—what's queer about queer studies now, in the two Chinas or elsewhere? My formulation of

this question comes from the 2005 special issue of *Social Text* (edited by David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Muñoz), but it has, in some form or another, been at the heart of conversations around “being critically queer,” the question of social transformation,⁴³ “queer occupy,”⁴⁴ queer antiwar movements,⁴⁵ and a host of other concepts. As queer people transform from victims to consumers, queer theory is no longer centered on loss, melancholia, or other feelings associated with the era of the AIDS epidemic. Instead, contemporary queer theory mourns the loss of radicality in queer movements, which have been taken over by the assimilationist logic of commodified desire. Against the backdrop of a perceived universal loss of queer radicality, North American critics have even more reason to consider the historical development of a nonliberal alternative as it has occurred in the Chinas. The insights of Chinese queer Marxist writers are particularly relevant to our times. In this book, I offer an analysis of their thinking on the alliances between labor and queer movements, the material conditions that govern permissible language and democratic participation, and the future of substantive equality. In turning to these ideas, I also hope to show that Marxist methodology has flourished in the two Chinas, both of which are locations that international commentators expect to have been eroded by capitalist penetrations. The vitality of Marxist thought in postsocialist China and anticommunist Taiwan also indicates the limits of a static conception of Marxism and queer struggles as historically successive social movements.

I do not intend to suggest that China alone has a queer Marxist tradition. Certainly, sophisticated meditations on the convergence of Marxism and queer studies are available in North American intellectual circles. A vibrant tradition that encompasses, among others, Kevin Floyd’s important *The Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* has already standardized the vocabulary for analyzing the relation between biopolitical reproduction and crisis of capitalist accumulation, a topic that received reinvigorated treatment in a 2012 special issue of *GLQ*.⁴⁶ However, as I mentioned already, scholars working in this vein tend to be more interested in queering Marxism than bringing historical materialism to bear on queer studies. But Marxism is not just a critique of capitalism, corporations, and consumption. It is also a philosophy of the totality of the social world, a critique of the bourgeois

conception of rights, an analysis of the mechanism that regulates differential access to resources, a social theory of alienation, and a dialectical method of reading historical tendencies and countertendencies. All of these strands of Marxist thought have influenced Chinese queer writings, which in turn provide some of the most powerful, yet underconsidered, resources for contemporary theory and politics.

The dynamic tradition of queer Marxism in the Chinas has produced a nonliberal queer theory, but reaping its insights requires the labor of two kinds of cultural translation. The first is disciplinary: we must take Chinese materials seriously as intellectual resources rather than local illustrations of theoretical paradigms already developed by the canon of queer theory. Doing so also means that we must adamantly reject the common division of intellectual labor in area studies programs between the production of paradigms (queer theory) and the gathering of raw materials (Chinese examples). Hence, we should not assume that queer theory automatically refers to the distinct body of theoretical works produced in 1990s' United States and later translated into Chinese. In my study, queer theory refers to a global discourse that was simultaneously developed by English, Chinese, and other academic traditions. Queer theory is a transnational and transcultural practice of which its US instantiation is only part. Moreover, this global dialogue is necessarily impure in its methodology, entangled in historical trajectory, and varied in modes of dissemination.

The second kind of translation performed in this book is methodological: I read fiction as theory and society as text. Literature is a node of densely woven information and ideas provided by a culture, though its insights are often obscured by its self-declared status as fiction in our habitual search for stable meanings, historical truths, and readily digestible propositions. Similarly, the social text of contemporary Chinese queer cultures often resists our desire to transcode it into political allegories and narratives of emergence. Despite the formidable work of the historians of sexuality, queer Chinese cultures remain recalcitrant, thwarting every effort to produce neatly organized histories from taboo to identity. Instead, those interested in reading, interpreting, or writing about Chinese queer cultures are more likely to be confronted with enigmatic political signifiers and overlapping temporalities. While these aberrant Chinese queer narratives fail to delineate the heroic